

**Third Place Winner**  
**Division I– 7-9th Grades**  
*The life, death, and legacy of Marielle Francisco da Silva*  
**by Anastasia P.**  
**Wellington Middle School, Wellington, CO**

Marielle Francisco da Silva didn't wake up on March 14, 2018, knowing that it was her last day she would stand up for what she believed in. A courageous woman, Marielle was a leading voice in black rights, LGBTQ+, and gender equality movements. She publicly denounced violence by military police against Brazil's poor, Black Brazilians, and fought for the LGBTQ+ community after announcing that she was a lesbian. Marielle knew what it was like being a black female in white male dominated council, and therefore came to find out some of those men still consider them as black slaves with no authority to enter their domain of power. She often tried to convince people to fight against social inequalities, which lead to her untimely death. She fought for what she believed in, inspiring me to voice my opinion and not let it be taken away. Since Marielle grew up in a Rio favela, a violent community with high drug-trafficking rates, she fought for and defended human rights.

At first, Marielle's death was seen as a travesty, which it was, but later, people brought up her name in recognition, and continued her battle. It is important that her work be continued on, so that her death was not in vain. Her mother, father, sister, wife and daughter are now activists like her and are following in her footsteps toward equality. They participate in activities such as protesting, volunteering at nonprofit organizations, and speaking out about Marielle's assassination. Her murder symbolizes the impunity, violence, racism, and desire for change rapidly growing in Brazil. Millions of people took to the streets singing her name, demonstrating their hatred for fascism. In her lifetime, Marielle was able to pass several laws and acts helping citizens living in the Favelas, as well as people within the LGBTQ+ community, and women suffering inequality. Marielle represented renewal for the Brazilians accustomed to moneyed, Middle-aged, white male politicians. Being the previously poor, Afro-Brazilian, lesbian she was, Marielle understood many people, and how to repair what needed to be repaired. She presented a well-needed alternative perspective to an unfortunately, square table. I genuinely believe her assassination was purely to cruelly destroy the mighty winds of change. It's disgusting to think that someone somewhere was so threatened, that they felt the need to take away Marielle's life-something no one could ever replace.

She inspires me to help change how the world sees it's people and fight for those who cannot fight for themselves. Marielle was able to take what was supposed to make her weak, turn that around and build herself up stronger. She did not let oppression from what she believed in get her down. She stood up for what she thought was just, and pushed through the adversary. When she began suffering explicit racism, sexism and homophobic behaviors, she used that to

help give voice to the silenced. She demonstrated moral courage by standing up and taking action for the causes she believed in, while risking and eventually losing her life.

I, too, sincerely want to offer a helping hand in the fierce battle against inequality. I have taken note on how Marielle fought heroically for human rights, and how to make a difference in the modern world. One remarkable way she took action was by leading passionate speeches to the public. In every speech she delivered, she always addressed the problem directly, never backing down, and provided solutions. Although this is powerful, I don't have the courage to physically speak out about topics I believe in. Another effective way Marielle took action was by volunteering in non-profit organizations. Thankfully, I fortunately possess the time to be a part of nonprofits during summer breaks, and plan on attending many events. Similar to the last, Marielle funded nonprofits like "Straight Talk" for example, which provided teens with a distinctive voice someone would listen to. I don't have the money to adequately support Nonprofits, but once I am old enough to work, I will make a habit of giving a percentage of what I make to organizations I believe in.

Throughout learning about her life, death, and enduring legacy, I have found that Marielle's persistent, immobile, and fearless determination seems to be the reason why so many oppressed people feel empowered to take a stand, no matter what the cause. Personally, Marielle has undoubtedly proved me that, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."- Dr. Suess.